

# Branches for burning

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you *are* the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. Jn 15:1-6

## Introduction

I have written on the meaning of this passage before in a paper whose title I forget. However, popular exposition of this passage is so confused it is worth a paper on its own.

The reason why I want to highlight this passage is because I take a view that is contrary to almost all other expositions in Reformed and evangelical commentaries. It strikes me that the exegesis that is commonly followed is slovenly and superficial, even by supposed great men.

This is sad since it means that the specific purpose of Jesus in mentioning this important piece of instruction is missed, by and large.

## The usual interpretation

There are two, each following a theological system; both follow the basic idea that the burned branches are apostates who are not saved.

### The Calvinist interpretation

Since Calvinists are opposed to the notion that saints can fall away from grace, their only recourse is to suggest that the people in view were only professing Christians that were not really saved but were part of the visible church.

### *Examples*

If a man, abide not in me - See Joh 15:4. If a man is not truly united to him by faith, and does not live with a continual sense of his dependence on him. This doubtless refers to those who are professors of religion, but who have never known anything of true and real connection with him.

Albert Barnes

It may be applied to anyone who has made a profession of Christ, and denies the truths of the Gospel, neglects the ordinances of it, or walks unworthy of his profession: of whom the following things may be truly said, he is cast forth as a branch; that is unfruitful, and is therefore taken away from the vine, and cast forth out of the vineyard. This signifies the ejection of worthless and fruitless professors out of the churches; for such who are either unsound in their principles, or are remiss and negligent in their attendance on the worship of God, with the church, or are loose and vain in their lives and conversations, are to be removed from communion with the people of God.

John Gill

It is here intimated that there are many who pass for *branches* in Christ who yet do *not bear fruit*. Were they really united to Christ by faith, they would bear fruit; but being only tied to him by the thread of an outward profession, though they seem to be branches, they will soon be seen to be dry ones. Unfruitful professors are unfaithful professors; professors, and no more. It might be read, *Every branch that beareth not fruit in me*, and it comes much to one; for those that do not bear fruit in Christ, and in his Spirit and grace, are as if they bore no fruit at all, Hos 10:1. It is here threatened that they shall be *taken away*, in justice to them and in kindness to the rest of the branches. From him that has not real union with Christ, and fruit produced thereby, *shall be taken away even that which he seemed to have*, Luk 8:18. Some think this refers primarily to Judas.

Matthew Henry

Thus Calvinists affirm that the people in view here are not Christians at all but merely superficial professors. This interpretation misses the point that the branches are in Christ and therefore must be elect.

### **The Arminian interpretation**

Since Arminians deny final perseverance of the saints, this passage is used as a proof text that saints can fall from grace.

#### *Examples*

**If a man abide not in me** - Our Lord in the plainest manner intimates that a person may as truly be united to him as the branch is to the tree that produces it, and yet be afterwards cut off and cast into the fire; because he has not brought forth fruit to the glory of his God. No man can cut off a branch from a tree to which that branch was never united: it is absurd, and contrary to the letter and spirit of the metaphor, to talk of being seemingly in Christ - because this means nothing. If there was only a seeming union, there could be only a seeming excision: so the matter is just where it began; nothing is done on either side, and nothing said to any purpose.

Adam Clarke

Thus the Arminian interpretation is that Christians are in view but these are Christians that fell away and are not saved. This interpretation correctly avers that the branches are in Christ but ignores many clear texts which affirm that elect believers are preserved by God's sovereign grace. Since this idea is a serious error oft refuted, it need not be discussed here but we will later show many texts refuting it.

## **The usual Calvinistic view cannot be the correct interpretation**

### **The context**

The first reason is that such an interpretation is in the wrong place.

Jesus has ceased talking about the necessity of salvation and the presentation of the Gospel. We see examples of this in John chapter 3, for example. He has also ceased remonstrating against the Pharisees and professors of religion. We see examples of this in chapter 8.

The verses we are looking at form the very heart of the Olivet discourse where the Lord had taken his closest disciples aside from the world to give them words from his heart. These words are part of the final and deepest words that Jesus ever spoke to his closest friends on earth before his resurrection. Judas had already left the company at this point; why would

Jesus talk about disciples falling away from salvation? His purpose was to explain deep things about their relationship with God through abiding in him and later receiving the Spirit of truth.

The context is not about the danger of falling away or about professing believers; it is about deep truths for Jesus' closest disciples whom he now calls 'friends'.

### **Those addressed**

The people that Jesus is speaking of are not a mixed company but are certainly true disciples, truly saved people.

## **My interpretation**

Contrary to the usual interpretations, my view (and that of a very few others) is that genuine Christians are in view but Jesus is not talking about salvation at all, but something else.

This is not a prolonged exposition of John 15:1-7 but a specific focus upon what the branches for burning refers to.

### **Background**

Having tried to explain that he was going away, something the disciples struggled to grasp, Jesus explained that his going away would benefit them in numerous ways; most notably that the Holy Spirit would come upon them and be an internal guide and comforter.

Furthermore, Jesus promised them that

- He would return to collect them.
- He would reveal himself to them.
- The Father would abide in them.

The conversation about the true vine and the branches follows on from Jesus' comfort that they would not suffer lack by his going away. Here he explains that despite going away they would be united with him in spiritual life; and by that communion they would bear fruit for God.

### **Context**

Certain key principles of interpretation are vital here. They are:

*Who is in view? What people are being spoken to?*

The answer is the 11 disciples. Jesus is not speaking to sinners and not to a mixed company of people; he is speaking to his own elect. The people in view are believers (Judas had already left).

*What is the background of the comments? Why are the people being spoken to in this way?*

Christ had just said, 'peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you'. He then rises from the Passover banquet and spends precious time giving his most important discourses to the disciples to prepare them for ministry.

The table contained the symbols of his death on the cross and it is the sacrifice of the cross which results in our peace. Rising up from the table is seen by some as symbolic of his resurrection. The discourse about him being the true vine is therefore spoken on

resurrection ground. This is the ministry that Christ maintains from heaven – ensuring his people bear fruit.

Jesus is explaining the importance of bearing spiritual fruit to glorify God.

*What is the key issue being discussed?*

It is not salvation; that is already presumed in the 11 disciples that Christ has blessed. It is about sanctification and bearing fruit. It is the fruit bearing of those already in resurrection life.

The word ‘fruit’ is mentioned eight times in this chapter and eight is the number of resurrection. The central purpose of this passage is the testimony of the believer in Christ to glorify God in this world by bearing fruit.

### **The Vine**

I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Jn 15:1

In the OT it was Israel that was pictured as a vine (Ps 80:8-9; Isa 5:1, 2, 7). This was to symbolise God’s representative on the earth (the vine arises from the earth) that bears fruit for him – i.e. that bears God’s testimony. The vine is God’s testimony on earth, full of fruit. The only purpose of a vine is to bear fruit; twisted wood is good for nothing else except burning.

Now Israel, God’s vine, has failed God’s purpose on earth (Jer 2:21; Hos 10:1) and the kingdom had been taken away (Matt 21:43). In any case Israel was merely that shadow that pointed to the Seed to come. Jesus is the true vine that bears fruit to God. This is why the word ‘true’ is emphasised.

‘True’ is not meant as being the opposite of false, but of being the perfect and essential reality of something, such as the ‘true vine’. The Lord is also spoken of being the true reality of several other typical features that had applied to Israel; for example:

- Christ was the true bread, Israel only had the type of the manna from heaven.
- Jesus was the true light (Jn 8:12); Israel had failed to be the light of God and the type of the lampstand was only a shadow.
- Jesus was the true tabernacle (Heb 8:5), Israel’s tabernacle was only a shadow.

The branches are the disciples of Jesus who are called to bear fruit, through Christ, on earth. The connection between Christ and the branches is eternal life, spiritual life. The branches are a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).

The people in view are those with eternal life, connected to Christ just as branches are connected to the main vine stem. Note that ‘abide’ occurs 15 times in verses 1-10. This is not a mixed company in a church; it is the elect alone; true believers. Only believers can abide in Christ.

The vine is a symbol of unity and oneness; it is impossible to identify on a vine where the branches end and the main stem begins.

The vine also symbolises dependency; the branches are fully dependent upon the vine for resources and support.

As a thing of the earth, the vine and the branches idiom is speaking of the Gospel age on earth, the period of our testimony. It is not speaking about heaven or the new world. Our opportunity to bear fruit is on the earth before we die.

### **Fruitless branches**

Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Jn 15:2

#### *This does not mean eternal destruction*

The Arminian interpretation would require that numerous verses were ripped out to the Bible, which very clearly testify to the preservation of the saints to the end by the work of God. For example:

His favour *is for* life. Ps 30:5

But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; you *are* mine. When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.' Isa 43:1-2

'For the mountains shall depart And the hills be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from you, nor shall my covenant of peace be removed,' says the LORD, who has mercy on you. Isa 54:10

And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from doing them good; but I will put My fear in their hearts so that they will not depart from Me. Jer 32:40

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. Jn 3:16

He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. Jn 3:36

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. Jn 5:24

And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.' Jn 6:35-37

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand. Jn 10:27-29

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. Rm 5:8-10

*There is* therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Rm 8:1

For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God *is for* us, who *can be* against us? Rm 8:29-31

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *Shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: 'For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.' Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Rm 8:35-39

... so that you come short in no gift, eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God *is* faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. 1 Cor 1:7-9

Jude, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ. Jude 1:1

So, whatever the words mean, they do not imply that saints can be lost. Furthermore, the Lord is not speaking to a mixed company but to elect believers. This is not about losing salvation.

*Yet it is addressing true believers*

We have earlier made this point. Thus Calvinists who seek to avoid the difficulty by saying that it refers to superficial believers within a mixed company in a local church are wrong.

When the Lord says, 'You are the branches', he cannot mean anything other than those who were directly connected to him in union of life. Furthermore, the branches that don't bear fruit and are taken away were originally 'in me', that is in Christ ('Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away'). The Lord could never tell a non-elect sinner that he was 'in me'. The much repeated phrase, 'in Christ' (= 'in him', 'in me', 'in whom' etc.) is only ever used of true believers.

*'Taken away' does not mean eternal destruction*

Firstly, this does not mean that the branch never bore fruit at all, that is not said; it is that it is a branch that is currently 'not bearing fruit' – which is the literal translation. For some reason this branch has stopped bearing fruit.

Can a true Christian stop bearing fruit? Of course he can. Peter warns that we can become unfruitful if we fail to apply the things he previously lists as important (2 Pt 1:1-8). This Christian is living a life of the flesh but not producing a spiritual testimony. This is equivalent of a plant that produces leaves but no fruit through lack of nourishment. I believe this is a widespread modern problem; fleshly, barren Christians.

Another thing that can cause fruitlessness to vines is disease (blight) causing a withering. Disease equates to sin; a Christian given over to sin will become unfruitful through corruption.

Such believers are 'taken away' by the vinedresser; that is, God. The Father does not take away sinners; judgment of men is committed to the Son.<sup>1</sup> This is referring to believers.

But 'taken away' is a poor translation; it usually means 'lifted up'. The word is *airo*, a Greek root word meaning: 'to raise up, elevate, lift up, to raise from the ground, take up', as well

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<sup>1</sup> Jn 5:22, 'the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son'. Jn 5:26-27, 'For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man'.

as, ‘to bear away what has been raised, carry off, to move from its place, to remove, to carry off, carry away with one’. The context demands that this word be translated as, ‘lifted up’.

So eternal condemnation is not in view here at all; it is an action of the Father to lift up fruitless believers to make them bear fruit again. The Father sends the Spirit to take whatever action is required to get the believer on course: conviction of sin followed by repentance; leading into greater truth; instilling a greater commitment etc. Christians that are not bearing fruit are first lifted up by the Father to see the problem.

### **Fruitful branches**

Every [one] *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Jn 15:2

Jesus is referring to the same class of people, the ‘everyone’ in him (‘branch’ is not in the original); of which some are bearing fruit and some are not.

While pruning is understood of the sovereign providence of God in allowing a believer to be afflicted for his benefit, again this is not necessarily a good translation.

‘Prune’ is *kathairo* meaning: ‘to cleanse, of filth impurity’, though it can also mean ‘to prune trees and vines from useless shoots’; ‘make clean by taking away an undesirable part’. Frankly, the word has two meanings: to cleanse and to prune. Some commentators stress the cleansing aspect but this is probably unwise; it means both.

The cleansing aspect is to wash off insects, parasites and other infestations. It is not symbolic of expiating the guilt of sin; this is a branch already bearing fruit; sin is not in view. It is more to do with defending the disciple from attack from outside enemy action.

The symbol of washing is accomplished in us by the word of God, ‘that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word’, (Eph 5:26). Jn 15:3 refers to this. God’s word removes from us that which hinders growth and fruit and which allows the ministry of the Spirit (sap) to flow through us effectively. It is to make us more effective in our testimony in this world now.

Being ‘made clean’ regards salvation and being justified and definitively sanctified to be fit for heaven (Jn 15:3; 2 Pt 1:9). That is not under view here. Being cleansed is different; that is the removal of defilement (2 Cor 7:1; Jm 4:8; 1 Jn 3:3). It is the truth of God’s word that makes us free always.

The two types of washing demonstrate the two aspects of sanctification: 1) definitive sanctification is absolute, eternal, in the past and gives us a legal standing in heaven (‘were washed’, 1 Cor 6:11). Being washed refers to progressive sanctification; the daily cleansing of the soul; the putting off of the old man (2 Cor 7:1). ‘Have been purified’ is definitive sanctification and justification (1 Pt 2:22) needing to be purified is progressive sanctification (Jn 13:10; 1 Jn 3:3).

The pruning aspect is to remove that which is not life threatening at all but which allows even more fruit to grow. The meaning of this is obvious.

### **Branches for burning**

If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw *them* into the fire, and they are burned. Jn 15:6

Again we must reiterate that this is not addressing sinners; it is speaking to believers.

After having expounded the importance of dependence upon Christ in the previous verses, of abiding in Jesus, the Lord explains how dangerous it is to neglect maintaining fellowship with him in the Spirit.

#### *Cast out*

If any believer is out of fellowship with him, he is cast out as a branch by the vinedresser (God). The problem is to determine what this means.

What happens when a believer is out of fellowship with God; he withers on the vine. There are very many withered Christians out there who, by ignoring fellowship with Christ, have slowly died of thirst. They are salt that has lost its savour (Matt 5:13). Their lives have no spiritual impact; they are living fleshly, dead lives.

This is a Christian that produces dead works. One reasonable interpretation is that this refers to a Christian being cast out of the responsibility he could have had in the eternal kingdom, but he is not lost. Salvation is not lost but his rewards are.

This refers to believers that have failed to use what God has given them and have ignored his fellowship; they end up losing their reward. Can this happen? John says yes:

**Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward. 2 Jn 1:8**

Another interpretation, or an additional meaning, is that what is also cast out is the old nature, not the new nature in Christ. Christ separates the old nature from the new nature at the end; the old is burned up but the new is embodied and saved (Phil 3:21). The old nature is part of the Christian in Christ now, but at the resurrection it will be taken away and burned. All that which comprised sin and unbelief in us will be burned away at the end.

That's what happens to these dead works? They are burned away and become meaningless. All the fruit of the old nature will be burned up; only what was in Christ will remain.

The Lord is talking to the individual failing believer, 'anyone' (singular) but the burning regards 'them' (plural), which are the works that are burned up. It does not say that 'he' is cast into the fire. Alternatively it could possibly be referring to the plurality of old natures that are burned up at the end, but the souls of Christians are saved.<sup>2</sup> Either way it is what are dead works in the kingdom that are removed by the angels (see next).

#### *They – the removers of offences in the kingdom*

'They' refers to the angels:

**The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Matt 13:41-42**

The 'things that offend' are the works of the flesh, the fruit of the old nature. These are different to 'those who practice lawlessness' (sinners).

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to understand sanctification here. The past tense of sanctification is that the spirit was saved; when you were regenerated you were given eternal life in your spirit. God dwells in the temple of your spirit. Throughout life your soul is being saved (present tense), which is progressive sanctification. The final aspect (future sanctification) is that at the end the old nature is removed from the soul and sanctification is completed instantly – we are made like Christ. Then we are given a new resurrection body to last eternity to express our holiness. Salvation is then complete.

*Paul's commentary on this*

Paul explains this using the illustration of wood, hay and stubble as dead works which are burned up:

If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. 1 Cor 3:14-15

Thus people who have only produced dead works will receive a negative judgment at the tribunal of Christ. They will still be saved but will have displeased the Lord:

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things *done* in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. 2 Cor 5:10

'Bad' here means 'of a bad nature, not such as it ought to be, base, wrong, wicked, troublesome, injurious, pernicious, destructive, baneful'. It refers to all the works of the old nature that were not put off by the believer. It is these that are burned up on the Day of Judgment.

Both Paul and the Lord Jesus are teaching the same thing; what is dead within us, through not abiding in Christ, will be removed and burned at the end. This is actually a comforting doctrine.

## Our works are tested, but sanctification is sure

*Works tested*

The doctrine that our works are tested and judged is prominent in the NT:

Each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. 1 Cor 3:13

For the time *has come* for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if *it begins* with us first, what will *be* the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? Now 'If the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?' 1 Pt 4:17-18

*Rewards*

Those who serve faithfully will receive rewards over and above his salvation. This reward has to do with function and positions of responsibility in the new world:

Love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Lk 6:35

Each one will receive his own reward according to his own labour. 1 Cor 3:8

If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. 1 Cor 3:14

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. Col 3:23-24

*Rewards lost*

Rewards can be lost; that is your good works that earn a divine reward can be lost when measured out against your dead works that served Satan.

Let no one cheat you of your reward. Col 2:18

Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but *that* we may receive a full reward. 2 Jn 1:8

This is not the place for a full discussion on the matter of rewards. For more on that see my papers, 'A simple paper on rewards' or 'Rewards in Biblical Theology' or 'Rewards and Judgment'.

*The old nature removed and sanctification completed instantaneously at the end*

Eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will also confirm you to the end, *that you may be* blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Cor 1:7-8

For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation *with* gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is. If anyone's work which he has built on *it* endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. 1 Cor 3:11-15

That He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. Eph 5:26-27

Being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ. Phil 1:6

You, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight. Col 1:21-22

That He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints. 1 Thess 3:13

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thess 5:23

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present *you* faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy. Jude 1:24

## The impact of the passage

The New Testament is at great pains to teach certain things that are unacceptable to most modern Christians. First, it clearly teaches that the church has many people in it that are not true believers and that everybody should test themselves to see whether they are in the faith (2 Cor 13:5). However, that problem is not in view here.

The second is equally important; it is that if believers (that is truly elect people) do not maintain proper fellowship with the Lord Jesus, do not abide in Christ, they will not bear any fruit. All they will do is produce dead works. At the Tribunal of Christ they will suffer great loss as they lose their rewards. They will enter heaven as saved people, but they will enter empty-handed.

It is, therefore, of great importance to understand how to put off your old nature daily and bear fruit by abiding in Christ (putting on the new nature).

## Conclusion

I first held this view of the passage from my earliest converted days, expounding it in the early 1970s. I remember giving a Bible study on this in Bristol when I think I was still a student (in Brighton). At that time I knew of no one else adopting this view, but my conscience would not let me do other because the text demanded it. In fact, I was grieved as I read commentary after commentary by great men, whom I respected, that were obviously wrong. Though I am nobody in comparison, I had to maintain my conscience.

Thus I was grateful when I, much later, discovered that some commentators took a similar view. Chief among these was the exposition of John by AW Pink. Only when I found this in a second-hand bookshop in Eastbourne in the late 1980s (and reading it much later) did I find a like mind.

I have taken Pink's comments into consideration as I write this.

Jesus' words in his final discourse to the disciples are not only vitally important and sublimely revealing, but they are some of the most important words of God every uttered. Thus it is crucial that we understand them correctly and put them into practice.

The problem of Christians producing nothing but dead works is one that is very prevalent in these end-times. We need to pay attention to what Jesus tells us.

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